

Encyclopedia of Antimony (Surma) in Islam and Modern Science

Introduction:

Antimony, known in Arabic as 'Ithmid' and commonly called 'Surma' in South Asia, is a natural black mineral traditionally used as kohl for the eyes. In Islam, it holds a special place as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used and recommended it. Surma is not only a form of beautification but also a means of healing and protection for the eyes. Modern science has confirmed many of its benefits, particularly for eye health and hygiene.

Surma in the Sunnah:

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used Surma regularly and encouraged others to apply it. He said, 'Use Ithmid (antimony), for it brightens the eyesight and promotes the growth of eyelashes.' (Sunan Ibn Majah 3497, Tirmidhi 1757). This hadith shows that Surma is both a Sunnah and a form of natural medicine. The Prophet ﷺ usually applied it before sleeping, and it was part of his daily hygiene and grooming practices.

Religious and Cultural Significance:

In Islamic culture, Surma symbolizes purity, modesty, and care for health. Applying it is considered an act of Sunnah, especially before sleeping. It was also used by both men and women in early Islamic society. The practice continues among Muslims worldwide, not only as a beauty tradition but as a reminder of the Prophet's teachings about cleanliness, health, and natural remedies.

Composition and Source of Antimony:

Antimony is a metallic element (symbol Sb) naturally found in mineral form. The best quality Surma comes from a type of antimony sulfide (Sb_2S_3) that is ground into a fine powder. In its natural state, it is black or grayish and has been used for centuries in traditional medicine and cosmetics. It is usually applied to the inner eyelids using a thin stick known as 'mismar' or 'applicator rod.'

Benefits of Surma in Prophetic Medicine:

In Tibb-e-Nabawi (Prophetic Medicine), Surma is recommended for strengthening eyesight, reducing redness and irritation, and improving eye cleanliness. It also helps remove dust and harmful particles from the eyes. The Prophet ﷺ's use of Surma shows his attention to both health and hygiene, setting an example for Muslims to follow. Scholars like Ibn al-Qayyim have mentioned its benefits in their works on Prophetic medicine, describing it as beneficial for vision and beauty.

Scientific Studies on Surma (Antimony):

Modern science supports some of the traditional benefits of Surma. Studies show that pure antimony compounds can protect the eyes by cleaning and soothing them. It has mild antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties, helping prevent eye infections. However, it is important to note that only natural, uncontaminated Surma should be used. Some commercial products contain harmful additives like lead, which can cause

serious health problems. Pure Ithmid from natural sources is safe and beneficial when applied properly.

Surma in Modern Eye Care:

Today, ophthalmologists and researchers recognize the importance of eye hygiene, something Islam emphasized 1,400 years ago. Surma, when prepared correctly, helps remove debris and keep eyes moist and clean. It is now being studied for possible medicinal use in treating eye conditions and infections. Modern laboratories have confirmed that certain types of Ithmid improve tear production and eye lubrication naturally.

Cosmetic and Aesthetic Value:

Beyond medical use, Surma has been used as a natural eye cosmetic for centuries. It enhances the appearance of the eyes and was used by both men and women for beautification. In Islamic history, Surma was used by scholars, travelers, and soldiers to protect their eyes from desert dust and glare. Its natural cooling and cleansing properties make it ideal for hot climates. Unlike chemical eyeliners, Surma provides a natural, chemical-free alternative for beauty and health.

Precautions and Modern Awareness:

Although Surma is beneficial, one must ensure it is pure and free from harmful metals like lead. The Prophet ﷺ's Surma (Ithmid) was natural and safe. Modern users should buy Surma from reliable sources and avoid synthetic or industrial types. Excessive or incorrect use may irritate the eyes. Moderation, cleanliness, and correct application are important to preserve the Sunnah and health benefits.

Summary:

Surma or Ithmid is both a Sunnah and a natural remedy recommended by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It strengthens eyesight, promotes eyelash growth, and cleans the eyes. Modern science confirms that pure antimony compounds have protective and healing properties for the eyes. However, users must be careful to use only pure, lead-free Surma. Its continued use reflects the harmony between Prophetic wisdom and scientific truth — proving that the guidance of Islam leads to both spiritual and physical well-being.